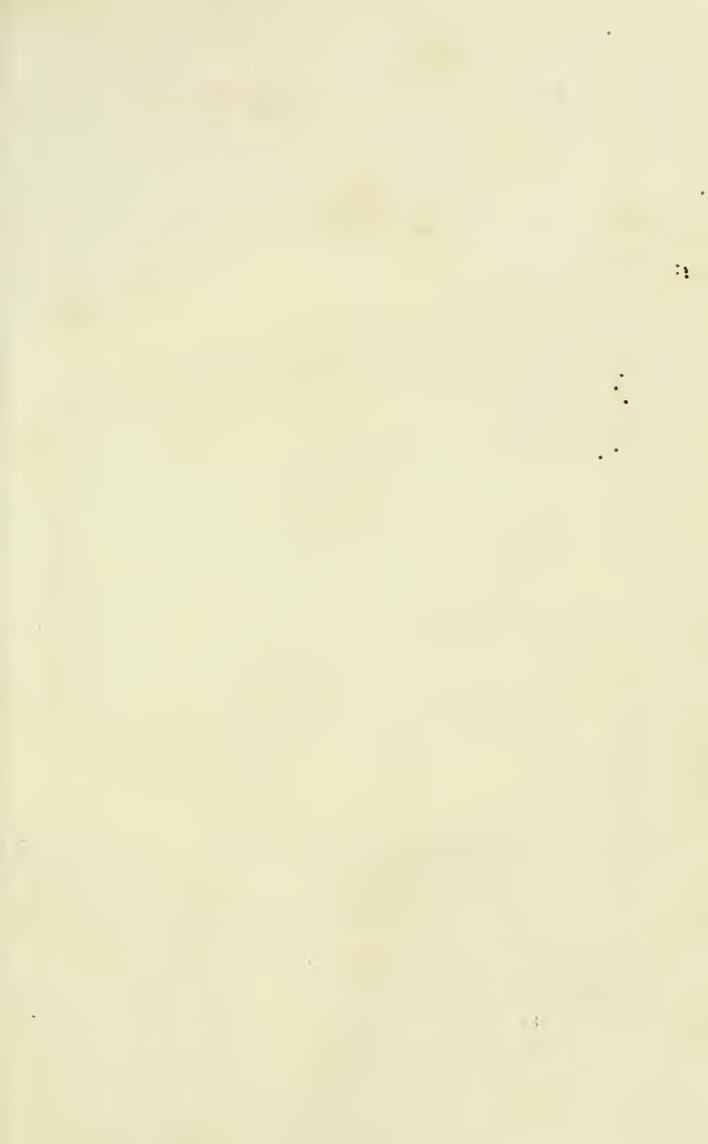




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## Crocodile Shooting.

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NUMEROUS as are the travellers who ascend the Nile, it falls to the lot of very few to kill a crocodile; few, indeed, succeed in obtaining a shot, and it not unfrequently happens that a traveller ascending no higher than the First Cataract, returns to Cairo without having even seen one. As it was my good fortune to kill and secure a large crocodile under somewhat exceptional circumstances in the spring of 1871, I offer my record of the transaction in the hope that other travellers may be encouraged to attempt the destruction of these dangerous and wary representatives of those old fish-eating Saurians, whose skeletons and even whose dinners we find entombed and preserved in the Lias. I fear that the sequel will show that the morality of the Saurian in the matter of diet has not been of a progressive nature.

Sir Gardner Wilkinson (Murray's "Handbook of Egypt") states that Beni Hassan, about 170 miles south of Cairo, in  $27^{\circ} 55'$  N. lat., is the northernmost limit of the crocodile. In the spring of 1848 I spent some hours endeavouring to procure a shot at several crocodiles which I observed on a sandbank at this place. The latest edition of Murray's "Handbook" (1867) contains a note declaring that crocodiles are now rarely seen below the First Cataract  $24^{\circ} 0'$  N. lat. Leaving England in haste last winter, and not expecting to meet with crocodiles, as I did not intend to pass the First Cataract, I was unprovided with a rifle, a want which I had cause to regret when, on passing Gebel Abou Fedá,  $27^{\circ} 32'$  N. lat. on the 10th February, I saw a large crocodile basking on a strip of alluvial soil at the base of the high cliffs which, at this part of the Nile, extend for about eight miles along the right or eastern bank of the river. As I sailed past at about 300 yards distance, I examined him through a telescope and carefully observed the place where he laid.

A few days afterwards I met a friend descending the Nile, to whom I gave information, arranging with him that he should send a letter to meet me at Thebes on my return voyage from the Cataract, telling me whether he had succeeded in killing the crocodile, and in the event of failure, giving me full particulars of his habitat, hours of basking, etc.

At the same time he lent me a double-barrel breech-loading rifle, carrying a heavy charge of powder and a large expanding bullet, not indeed possessing the very flat trajectory of the most modern "express" rifle, but at the same time being a powerful and useful weapon. On my return to Thebes, about the middle of March, I found a letter from my friend, telling me that he had spent two days in a vain attempt to obtain a shot, that he had seen the crocodile frequently, and that in a certain cave indicated I should find a note with full instructions. He added that while waiting for the crocodile his boat-keeper, who had been concealed at a little distance, had had a narrow escape, the crocodile having endeavoured to sweep him into the river with his tail, while he was performing his ablutions. On the 21st March I passed Siout, and early in the morning of the 22nd I found myself within a few miles of the crocodile. I was unable to get nearer to the place in my dahabieh—or Nile boat—as a strong northerly wind set in soon after daylight. I therefore started in my small boat with a crew of four men, and at about ten a.m. arrived at the haunt of the crocodile. Coming round a point of rock, I saw him lying on the shore, but in a moment he slid into the water. Looking for the cave which my friend had indicated, I found a small hole about eight feet above the water, raking the strip of alluvial soil some sixty yards long by five yards wide, which the crocodile frequented. I examined the ground, and found it rubbed smooth at the spot where he was in the habit of lying. Claw marks of various sizes on the mud showed that he was not the sole occupant.

Above me the cliff rose sheer from the water for two or three hundred feet, and once in my cave there was no retreat except by water. Sending the boat to the other side, some 800 yards distance, I arranged my den as well as I could. Miserably cramped and squeezed, seated on rock of excruciating hardness and irregularity, I waited for the enemy. Half-an-hour had elapsed without incident, when I turned round to extract my cigar case from a crevice behind me in which I had deposited certain comforts. On recovering my position, I became aware of a greenish object on the surface of the water some five yards from my feet. In another moment the eyes and snout of the crocodile appeared, and gradually his back and the serrated ridges of his tail floated up. He had hardly shown his full length when a distant boat alarmed him, and he dived down with a circular motion which left the water swirling in eddies.

I noted the time of his appearance, and lit my cigar, satisfied that, recessed as I was in my cave, he would not see me, and that if I waited patiently he would appear as the midday sun invited him to bask. Another half hour passed, and the same green object again appeared just below my feet. After exhibiting his full length on the surface, he gradually edged to the shore, some three yards distant. Placing his forefeet on the mud, under water, he began to stretch and yawn, opening his mouth to its widest, and showing a formidable row of irregular teeth. Although he was quite close to me, I would not fire, as his tail was floating in deep water, and I knew that, if wounded, he would sink in the rapid current bordering the quiet eddy in which he was disporting himself. I also expected that he would crawl on the patch of soil which was some five yards on my left front, where I could have made sure of him.



For ten minutes I watched him anxiously, noting what appeared to be his softest places, and admiring the power and flexibility which he showed. Suddenly, to my disappointment, he turned and swam away parallel to the shore, his stomach flattening out as it rested on the water, and giving him an appearance of great breadth.

After swimming some sixty yards, and having reached the further end of the patch of land, he turned in again, and began to stretch and yawn as before. I now felt that I might lose him if I did not take an early opportunity of a shot, as boats were likely to pass and disturb him at any moment. Waiting until he stretched his head to the utmost, I fired as low down as I could without striking the water. He threw himself back, and then rolled over, plunging and struggling for several seconds. I fired the second barrel as he rolled about, but without effect. In another moment he had disappeared, and all was quiet again. I hung a preconcerted signal out of my cave, and in a short time saw my boat approaching, the men evidently in a state of wild excitement. In the interval I had taken the precaution of making a sketch of a crocodile in my note-book, marking the spot where my shot had struck him. This I showed to my men, in order to establish my claim to his body should it turn up elsewhere.

We examined the spot where he had disappeared, but of course found nothing. Soundings gave us a steep and rocky bottom, and the rapid current into which he had slid in his struggles gave little hope of ever seeing him again. I returned into my cave, remaining there until four p.m. Two other crocodiles, a large and a small one, showed themselves in the course of the afternoon, but always under circumstances which made it useless to fire at them with any chance of securing their carcases. I have since regretted that I did not fire for the mere purpose of destroying them.

Hidden in my cave, I watched two Nile-fishing boats as they drifted past me, using hand-lines, in much the same manner as one fishes for whiting off the Eddystone. Every hour or two they sailed back to their starting point up stream, sometimes towing a large silurus or other Nile-fish at their stern.

The next morning I got my dahabieh opposite the spot but could do nothing. Windbound all day, towards evening news came from a neighbouring village that a sick crocodile had been seen up a creek a mile away, and on the western side of the river, that forenoon, exactly twenty-four hours since my shot had been fired. I examined my informant, the village watchman, and satisfied myself that it was worth my while to search the spot.

From seven to nine a.m. the next morning we dragged the bottom of the creek, with a line covered with bare hooks, a common mode of catching fish in the Nile, and I returned to the dahabieh weary of the search, and anxious to avail myself of the fine weather to proceed northward. My dragoman, Hamet Saffi Kenaanah—who must be familiar to many of your readers as having dry-nursed the hippopotamus in the Zoological Gardens for several years—urged me to make another attempt. We sent out our boat, and after much difficulty—as the man thought we intended to rob him—persuaded one of the fishermen who had passed me so frequently two days before, to come and assist us.

We now took two boats, and “swept” the bottom of the creek sedulously for some time without the least result. At this juncture,

Hamet proposed that we should try the effect of an invocation to the patron saint of Nile fishermen, Sheikh Saleh. This pious suggestion was at once acted upon, and the Sheikh's name pronounced with due solemnity. Its efficacy had been proved before when engaging a native fisherman to use his casting-net for our amusement. At every throw the propitious name was uttered, and sure enough at times a fish was found in the net, thus disposing of any infidel doubts. This time also it proved effectual, for the line fouled something directly, to Hamet's great comfort. After making one of the boats describe a complete circle round the spot, in order to fix as many hooks as possible, the fisherman began to haul up. Inch by inch—his line being very slight—he carefully raised some heavy weight, and at last the nose of a dead crocodile appeared above the water. All was now excitement. The natives, who had congregated in some numbers, shrieked with joy, patted me affectionately on the back, and availed themselves of the auspicious moment to put forward loud claims for backsheesh. It should be remarked that I had relieved *them* of a deadly enemy!

To end a long story, we towed the beast with much labour to the dahabieh, and rolling him up an inclined plane made by our long oars, deposited him on the deck. After permitting a young woman to come on board, and bestride the carcass for some superstitious reason which I did not venture to inquire into too closely, and after having satisfied the fisherman and watchman—no easy matter on the Nile—we left the crowd, and landing some six miles away, took our victim ashore and skinned him. This operation took several hours and spoilt several knives. It gave me, however, an ample opportunity of observing his enormous muscular power and the facilities for rapid locomotion indicated by his form and limbs.

After much digging at him we reached his stomach, and there, mixed with a hatful of pebbles, we found some brass wire earrings, fragments of a brass bracelet and a brass bead. Our men at once declared that these articles had belonged to a small Fellah—a peasant girl—not younger than four years and not much above ten years of age, as a mature female would not be satisfied with such ornaments. My bullet was found exactly in the place indicated, flattened out perfectly, and having done its work with terrible effect. Two small native bullets were also found in his body. His length was 14ft. 4in.; his widest girth, 5ft. 4in. Land and water were equally his haunts during his misspent life—with your permission, LAND AND WATER shall record his death.

D. u. c. c.







